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Press Release

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Learn to ID, prevent, treat indoor mold

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HEIDELBERG, Germany -- With mold being prevalent throughout Europe, the questions of mold effects on health, mold exposure and prevention is important to all living throughout the theater.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services Web site, symptoms of mold exposure can be nasal stuffiness, eye irritation, wheezing, or skin irritation, but people with mold allergies may have more severe reactions.

"Mold exposure does not always present a health problem indoors," said Linda Ording, an industrial hygienist with U.S. Army Garrison Ansbach, Germany. "However, some people are sensitive to molds. Immune compromised people and people with chronic lung illnesses, such as obstructive lung disease, may get serious infections in their lungs when exposed to mold."

Thus, mold has to be taken seriously, said Capt. Matthew T. Perry, chief of Environmental Health Services, U.S. Army Medical Activity-Bavaria.

"If anyone feels that his or her health is being affected by a mold issue they need to have it addressed by a health care professional since the signs and symptoms are consistent with other illnesses," he said.

For many homes in Bavaria, mold may be more of a problem than what most Americans are used to, Perry said.

Mold can be found both indoors and outdoors. It invades homes through open doorways, windows, vents, and heating and air conditioning systems.

The spores float through the indoor and outdoor air continually, and they can attach themselves to clothing, shoes, bags, and even pets. However, there are ways to prevent mold, such as opening windows at least twice daily for 10- 20 minutes or ensuring adequate ventilation.

Mold infestations can usually be seen or smelled. Self-help for smaller mold issues is a possibility. Environmental Health Services recommends using detergent and water to wash mold off hard surfaces and allowing it to dry completely for mold problems of about ten square feet or smaller.

"I don't have a ventilations system in my bathrooms, so small mold spots appear at the ceiling," said Sgt. 1st Class Carmen Martin, USAG Ansbach Headquarters, Headquarters Detachment. "I mix bleach and water in a spray bottle, spray the spots and use a sponge-mop I have solely dedicated for mold."

This is a cleaning procedure Perry agrees with.

"A bleach solution of one cup of bleach to one gallon of water can also be used," he said.

However, Perry added, it is necessary to use gloves, eye protection and a dust mask or respirator for protection when cleaning mold.

People with health concerns should consult a doctor before doing any mold cleanup, Perry said.

"If you can see the mold or smell a musty odor, you have a mold problem. A thorough investigation is necessary though to determine the cause of the moisture problem," Ording said.

And some problems are bigger than others, Perry added.

"In severe cases, it may be necessary to remove the occupants from their dwelling until the remediation or repair is completed."

People who believe they have mold problems that exceed 10 square feet should call housing.

For more information on mold, checkout the following resources from the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine Web site:

http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/mold/Mold_TriFold.pdf

http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/mold/Mold_Prevention_Home.pdf

<http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/documents/FACT/64-005-0203.pdf>

The Environment Protection Agency has a Web site with tons of information, such as mold basics, cleanup and control tips. The site is:

<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/moldguide.html>

Other informational sites include:

MOLD AND YOUR HOME (EPA GUIDE) - <http://www.epa.gov/mold/pdfs/moldguide.pdf>

MOLD FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (Center for Disease Control) - <http://www.cdc.gov/mold/faqs.htm>

PROTECTING YOURSELF FROM MOLD (CDC) - <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/pdf/moldprotection.pdf>

THE SCIENCE OF MOLDS AND HUMAN HEALTH (CDC)- <http://www.cdc.gov/mold/pdfs/moldsci.pdf>

BENEFITS OF BLEACH (WebMD) - <http://www.webmd.com/allergies/news/20050922/study-bleach-cuts-allergy-triggers-in-mold>

Mold prevention tips:

- Keep the humidity level in your home between 40 and 60 percent.
- In homes without central heating and air conditioning systems, open windows twice a day for 10-20 minutes at a minimum.
- Be sure your home has enough ventilation.
- Use exhaust fans that vent outside your home in the kitchen and bathroom. Make sure your clothes dryer vents outside your home.
- Fix any leaks in your home's roof, walls, or plumbing so mold does not have moisture to grow.
- Clean up and dry out your home thoroughly and quickly (within 24-48 hours) after any water incursion.
- Add mold inhibitors to paints before painting.
- Clean bathrooms with mold-killing products (a 10 percent bleach solution is adequate).
- Remove or replace carpets and upholstery that have been soaked and cannot be dried promptly.
- Consider not using carpeting in areas like bathrooms or basements that have a lot of moisture.
- If using bleach to clean up mold:
- Never mix bleach and ammonia or other household cleaners. Mixing bleach with ammonia or other cleaning products can produce dangerous toxic fumes.
- Open windows and doors to provide fresh air.
- Wear non-porous gloves and protective eyewear.
- If the area to be cleaned is more than 10 square feet, contact the Housing Office.

Sources: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Web site, pamphlets of U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion Preventive Medicine, Industrial Hygiene/Preventive Medicine Mold Assessment Guide